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OUR CAR

Sylvia Wolfe

A car became part of my life at the same time my husband did.

As a young teenager in '32 and '33, I would sit on a Sunday in the gangway hidden from view of the passerbys on the sidewalk. I would sit and study the people going out and coming back to their homes. Very few people had cars, but there were some who did. I wondered what it would be like to own a car. To be able to take a ride out to the country or to see a friend.

Marrying Virgilio in April of '42 changed things; he came up here from a small town in Indiana and with him, his car. Then I too began to know the feeling of having a car. We usually drove west on Sunday, stopped and had an ice cream or sandwich and returned like the rest of the hoi polloi.

December of 1942 saw Virgilio go into the Army. His 1937 Plymouth was parked out on the street. In a few months a friend with whom I worked said her husband was a mechanic. After our discussion of what would be the best way to keep the car in good condition, her husband was to come and take the car and drive it around for a month. The month came and went, and the car was not returned. I finally had to put a little pressure on to get the car back. I was not very quick to write Virgilio about my predicament, but finally the car was back. This time I rented a garage from a neighbor, and it was across the alley. I had the car put up on jacks and did what had to be done to keep it safe and sound. The car stayed there for three and a half years.

Finally, Virgilio came home. After a short time, we called an auto repair company. It was north on Clark Street. They towed it out for three hundred dollars — and completely overhauled it. To me, especially, it was like a miracle, but naturally the greater miracle was that Virgilio returned. If we had wanted to buy a new car, we would have been on a list. If not, one had to pay a good sum under the table. We kept our car, and it came back in good condition.

From that time on, we made many trips to the town where Virgilio had lived — to Hobart, Indiana, where we found wild flowers and daisies along the railroad tracks and transplanted them to our yard. I learned where a person went after getting into a car.

Then, after fifteen years of faithful service, our car finally started to fail us. In 1952, we finally sold our Plymouth for twenty-five dollars — to a friend who had a farm and was going to use it out in Wisconsin. The Plymouth looked just as good when it left us as it had when new. It had been simonized and buffed, and the tires were always cleaned. That was the last Plymouth we owned. Virgil's brother worked for General Motors, and one year they were on strike. We thought by buying a Chevy, Virgilio's brother would be back to work soon. (The brother did go back to work, and it was Chevys and Buicks when we too became a little more affluent.)

At age fifty-five, I learned to drive. We bought a Ford for me. Then finally Hoover's slogan became true for us: "two cars in every garage."

In 1977, after cataract operations on both eyes, no longer having peripheral vision, my moment for driving was finished. Then it was back to one car — a Buick for Virgilio. He was always thinking of older people; he insisted on four doors so his mother, my mother, whomever, would not have to squeeze in.

We had much pleasure in every car.